



Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers February 21, 2008

Latest Traffic Safety News

Traffic Deaths Lower in 2007

Traffic fatalities fell 3 percent in 2007 from the year before, according to the National Safety Council. In 2007 43,300 people died in traffic crashes, 5 percent fewer than in 2005. Disabling injuries totaled about 2.3 million, a 4 percent decrease from 2006.

Candidates Don't Think Much about Road Issues When on Road

As the presidential candidates hit the campaign trail, one topic they don't seem to cover is transportation. Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama have hinted they want more mass transit, while former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and Sen. John McCain have said little about the topic. Former Gov. Mike Huckabee said he wants to add lanes to I-95 on the East Coast. "If a new president came into office and made it a priority to revise the way that we spend our transportation funds and if the president spent an enormous amount of energy and political capital trying to make it happen, it might," an expert said. A tough challenge for the next president will be increasing mobility while trying to tackle global warming. A federal commission released a report last month that shows the country needs to invest \$225 billion a year for the next 50 years in all forms of transit. For more information, go to <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-traffic4feb04,1,3943683.story>

Source: The Los Angeles Times, February 4, 2008

Cars Becoming More and More Like Distracting Living Rooms

Auto companies are turning vehicles into living rooms on the road, where occupants can listen to mp3 players, watch movies, play video games and even go online. Safety experts say the influx of electronics is making the commute more chaotic. New York State Senator Carl L. Marcellino sponsored a bill last year to ban all "display generating devices" in a driver's view. "The driver shouldn't be doing anything other than driving," Marcellino said. The auto companies say they're responding to consumer demand and providing safer hands-free and voice-activated systems. A naturalistic driving study involving 100 cars found that hand-held wireless devices were the biggest cause of distractions that resulted in a crash. More distracted driving research that will follow 2,500 drivers nationwide will be released in 2010. For more information, go to

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/12/business/12distract.html?_r=1&ref=technology&oref=slogin (may require free registration) Source: The New York Times, February 12, 2008

Eating, Drinking Behind Wheel Can Cause Crashes

Researchers used Brunel University's driving simulator to determine whether eating and drinking while driving, commonly perceived as less risky than talking on a phone while driving, causes crashes. The simulator tested participants on a typical urban scenario. At designated points on the drive that coincided with instructions to eat or drink, a "pedestrian" walked in front of the car. Driving performance variables were unaffected, but perceived driver workload was significantly higher when eating and drinking. When coupled with previous research, the findings indicate that eating and drinking behind the wheel can increase the risk of a crash.



Nebraska Business Leaders Support Gas Tax Hike

A group of business leaders showed up to a public hearing in Lincoln, Nebraska to support a likely increase in the state's gas tax. A representative of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce said that when prospective companies look at a community, roads and the transportation system are high on their list of priorities. Good roads are an economic development priority, because improving roads improves the business climate of the state. The Nebraska Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association was the only group to oppose the bill during the hearing. The new gas tax would generate \$38 million for roads during the first year, which would help counteract the \$80 million in federal funds the state expects to lose a year. For more information, go to

<http://www.journalstar.com/articles/2008/01/31/news/politics/doc47a1212ecad43201048507.txt>

Source: Lincoln Journal Star, January 30, 2008

Drivers Will Pay for Congestion They Create

As society moves from rural conditions to urban settings, people expect more freedom of movement, especially in cars instead of the buses or trains of the past. In New York City, gridlock is expected to cost up to \$20 billion a year in lost productivity. The world will have a billion cars sometime near 2020. City managers and urban planners say congestion can, and must, be controlled in a crowded world. One way to manage the problem is for drivers to pay as they go and pay higher fees on the busiest streets. A team of experts devised a plan that would raise enough fees—more than \$2 billion a year—to make subways and buses free. For more information, go to

<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/31/managing-traffic-in-the-urban-age/>

Source: The New York Times, January 31, 2008

Three More States Will Bar Illegal Immigrants from Obtaining Driver's Licenses

Illegal immigrants in Oregon no longer can get driver's licenses, and Michigan has stopped issuing new licenses to everyone but citizens and legal permanent residents. Starting in 2010, Maryland will require applicants to prove they're in the United States legally. Maine, New Mexico, Utah, Washington and Hawaii allow illegal immigrants to drive, but there have been attempts to reverse course in all those states except Hawaii. Political pressure and a federal law that sets standards for licenses motivated the changes. Some migrant advocates are concerned that immigrants will drive without licenses and insurance. For more information, go to http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-01-29-illegal-immigrants-licenses_N.htm

Source: USA Today, January 29, 2008

Georgia Drivers Get Election Results from Billboards

Georgia voters didn't have to stay home to watch the results of Super Tuesday elections—20 electronic billboards broadcast the latest updates from the state's presidential primary that evening and showed the winners the next day. The practice started in Iowa earlier this year and continued in Michigan and Florida. The billboards must abide by safety regulations, such as not being too bright, showing movement or switching quickly between images. For more information, go to

http://www.ajc.com/search/content/metro/stories/2008/01/31/billboards_0201.html

Source: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, February 1, 2008

Analyzing Congestion Types May Lead to Solutions

Separating recurrent from non-recurrent congestion and finding out how various causes contribute to delays can help with the design of effective countermeasures. Recurrent congestion occurs regularly when freeway capacity is exceeded and traffic slows. Non-recurrent congestion happens when weather, lane closures/work zones and other incidents cause extra delays.



Technological Advances Expected to Make Strides in Truck Safety

Though technology is expected to make radical changes in truck safety, there won't be government incentives to help trucking adapt to new technology. "If our agency can gather enough information to demonstrate that these new safety devices can lower truck accidents significantly, then the insurance industry may extend the same kind of discounts they offer to cars that have extra safety devices," a Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) official said. Technology is a major focus for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and trucks must play a part because they're involved in 12 percent of fatal crashes annually. It's possible that within five to 10 years, every truck will be equipped with a monitoring device that will allow trucks to communicate with each other, fleet headquarters and government devices. The government plans to install devices along the nation's highways that would read onboard monitors and allow for some sort of automated enforcement. For more information, go to <http://www.ttnews.com/lmt/dec07/incentives.asp>

Source: Light & Medium Truck, December 2007

Study Shows Drivers Slow Down When Speed Cameras Installed

When speed cameras are posted on roads, drivers in Montgomery County, Maryland slow down, a new report shows. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety compiled the data, which could boost efforts to place cameras in other parts of the state. Speed camera systems detect how fast vehicles are going, take pictures and send a citation to that vehicle's owner. The Montgomery County study focused on cameras operated by police employees inside minivans instead of cameras mounted on poles, possibly tipping off drivers. At locations with both cameras and warning signs, speeding dropped about 70 percent; with just signs, about 40 percent; and with no signs or cameras, 15 percent. Researchers measured speeds before and after cameras and signs were installed and compared results to similar areas with no cameras. Because of the project's success, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley announced he will introduce legislation to allow local governments to use speed cameras. For more information, go to <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/30/AR2008013003718.html> (may require free registration) or

http://www.iihs.org/research/topics/pdf/speed_cameras_montco.pdf

Source: The Washington Post, January 31, 2008

Smart Signals Could Keep Traffic Flowing

"Smart" traffic lights that keep track of vehicles wirelessly could speed up trips, reduce fuel consumption and improve air quality. During rush hours, these traffic lights could reduce the time drivers spend waiting at intersections by more than 28 percent. Researchers recorded peak traffic flow at a major intersection in Bucharest, Romania and created simulations from the information. In the simulations, traffic lights were sent the position and speed of all nearby vehicles and programmed to calculate how to phase color changes for the best flow of traffic. The researchers found an added benefit: Emissions could fall by 6.5 percent. For more information, go to

<http://technology.newscientist.com/channel/tech/motoring-tech/dn13306-could-smart-traffic-lights-stop-motorists-fuming.html> Source: NewScientist News Service, February 12, 2008

Engineers Celebrate Safety Week in May

When North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH) Week kicks off in Washington, D.C. on May 5, the American Society of Safety Engineers, Canadian Society of Safety Engineering and OSHA will show that safety does pay. "During NAOSH Week, we will work to provide examples of how designing and putting into place strong safety management processes help keep employees safe, the company reputation intact and customers happy, while having a positive impact on a company's bottom line," the ASSE president said. Winners of the "Safety on the Job" kids' poster contest will receive awards at the U.S. Capitol. Occupational Health and Safety Professional Day will be celebrated on May 7. An electronic toolkit, posters, pens and T-shirts are available for distribution.



Dan Vartanian
NETS Coordinator
Office of Highway Safety Planning
(517) 333-5322
vartanid@michigan.gov
www.michigan.gov/michnets





News from USDOT

NHTSA Hopes New Rules, Technology Will Reduce Truck Crashes

Because truck-involved fatalities have plateaued for years, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommends new technologies to reduce crash rates. NHTSA's associate administrator for rulemaking said the agency could release rules on brake stopping distance, brake hose materials and electronic and roll stability control this year. Later, NHTSA might address tire-pressure, lane-departure and forward-warning collision systems. The final rule for stopping distance should be ready by mid-year; there's been some disagreement about the level at which the standard should be set. For more information, go to

<http://www.ttnews.com/articles/basetemplate.aspx?storyid=19165> Source: Transport Topics, February 11, 2008

International Traffic Safety News

Survey Shows Young Drivers Regularly Take Risks

Many young drivers engage in extremely risk-taking behavior, such as overtaking when the view isn't clear and driving under the influence. Recently published research shows that 11 percent of drivers between ages 17 and 25 regularly drive after taking illegal drugs. Road safety charity Brake and Green Flag surveyed 4,600 young drivers and found that a third overtake when they can't see what's coming toward them. One in five use a hand-held cell phone while driving at least once a week. Fleets with young drivers are starting to pay attention to this high-risk group. BT conduct in-vehicle apprentice training and vehicle familiarization courses with its young drivers. Source: FleetNews, February 7, 2008

Company Assesses New Drivers To Lower Crash Rates

Because fleets don't know young drivers' backgrounds or driving abilities, their competency and experience must be tested before they are allowed on the road. Car transportation firm nkl has a strong set of policies to ensure job applicants meet expectations. Brake awarded nkl the fleet safety award last year, and the Department for Transport named it a road safety business champion. Drivers are put through various tests, driver's license checks and an interview before they start. "The eyesight test, particularly, is very important – we have had to send quite a lot of people to get glasses before they can go on to the next stage," nkl's managing director said. Less than a quarter of candidates who apply continue on to full employment. The company's record is impressive—the last at-fault accident was 16 months ago. Source: FleetNews, February 5, 2008

Group Calls for Penalty Points for Unbuckled Motorists

One third of vehicle occupants who die in crashes in the United Kingdom were not wearing seat belts. That amounts to 370 people a year who die unbelted. Van drivers are the worst offenders—only 69 percent buckle up, and just 58 percent of their passengers wear belts. Only seven in 10 adults wear seat belts in the back seat, even though 90 percent of people agree it is dangerous to do so. To motivate more people to buckle up, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents recommends that occupants receive three penalty points if they're caught unbelted. Right now drivers face fines, but no points. Source: FleetNews, January 31, 2008

Government Intervention Leads to Stronger Traffic Safety Culture in Australia

The paper "Overcoming Barriers to Creating a Well-Functioning Safety Culture: A Comparison of Australia and the United States" explores how the two countries' safety cultures differ. In the United States, the low priority given to traffic safety and tendency to attribute the problem to "other" drivers leads to limited funding. Australia's governments have been more willing to intervene to protect public



safety and allocate resources accordingly. The author recommends several steps for creating a stronger traffic safety culture in the United States.

Campaign Helps Fleet Managers Convince Boards to Focus on Road Safety

A new campaign to help convince companies' boards that traffic safety is a priority could cut the estimated £2.7 billion employers lose from "at-work" crashes. Road safety charity, Brake and Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance call for board directors to listen to fleet managers' concerns. Brake launched a low-cost workshop and free packet to help fleet managers influence their boards. The information outlines the importance of getting the board's support, steps for making a fleet safety case and how to develop an ongoing relationship. Source: FleetNews, February 11, 2008

Work-Home

New Five-Star System Rates Child Safety Seats' Ease of Use

U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters announced a new five-star government rating system that grades child safety seats on how easy they are to install. "Even the safest car seat can't protect a child if it isn't installed correctly," Secretary Peters said. "These new star ratings arm parents with the best information and challenge manufacturers to make car seats that are easier for parents to use." Seven out of 10 child safety seats are the wrong size or seriously misused, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Secretary Peters and NHTSA Administrator Nicole Nason released new star ratings for 78 seats on the market. Expanded criteria are used to evaluate the seats, which receive an overall rating and in four individual categories: securing the child, vehicle installation features, labeling and instructions. The new system does not measure seats' effectiveness, but rather compares how easy they are to use. A list of the new rankings is available at www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Crash Rate Increases for Older Motorcycle Riders in Michigan

Baby boomers make up almost two-thirds of all motorcycle crashes in Michigan, a recent study by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute shows. The number of licensed motorcyclists over age 45 has increased, but riders under age 45 have decreased. Motorcycle crashes rose by 9 percent from 2001 to 2005. The crash rate per licensed rider increased more than 30 percent for older riders but only 6 percent for those under 45. Researchers suggest that the greater number of fatalities among older riders could be attributed to the fragility of older bodies.

Latest Elderly Driver Crash Prompts Governor to Support Stricter Testing

Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick said he supports some type of road testing for seniors after a recent crash involving an elderly driver. In that incident, an 86-year-old lost control of his SUV outside of a school, hitting and pinning a second-grader beneath the vehicle, sending her to the intensive care unit. Previous efforts to require tests for older drivers have been opposed by AARP, which thinks stricter testing should apply to all drivers. Massachusetts is one of three states that does not test senior drivers at all. For more information, go to

<http://www.bostonherald.com/news/regional/politics/view.bg?articleid=1072086>

Source: Boston Herald, February 8, 2008